

Improving the attraction of public finance
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Recruiting, developing and keeping good finance professionals can be hard. It's a competitive market, which has only increased with the explosion of technology and all things digital. For people today, there's less of what used to be called the 'finance premium', a job for life and a meteoric career path. However, as CIPFA members and leaders in public finance, it's our job to change perceptions and make what we do attractive to a wider range of people.

Like many reading this, public finance has provided me with great opportunities, which, as a young black woman starting out, I could not have imagined or indeed planned for. Public Finance provides an arena where talented people can thrive. Creating an environment that attracts diverse talent is challenging and the issues are complex, but here are some of my thoughts about how we can sell the benefits to a diverse group of future successors.

We need to change the story

We often get stuck on negative narratives about the public finance world – that it's all about reducing budgets and cutting services. Finance professionals have vital skills that make a difference to the communities they serve. They also have the ability to contribute to the broader socio-economic arena and as one of my CIPFA colleagues stated "make an historic imprint and achieve lasting change."

I studied for a multi-disciplinary business studies degree, and having worked for the BBC in the pensions department produced a dissertation called *State Pensions: The Poverty Gap*. I was hooked by the influential role that finance played at a governmental, business and personal level. When I started my career in finance at Lambeth Council and qualified as a CIPFA accountant, I was able to witness the direct relationship between effective service provision and use of capital and revenue. I was impressed by the passion and commitment of the people involved in delivering services in a non-discriminatory way.

There's more to finance than the money

CIPFA provided the foundation for me to understand that challenges are multi faceted and decision-making processes can be equally complex. Ultimately it's about doing the right thing with integrity and remembering that the devil is in the detail. I remember my friends asking me why I wanted to be a bean counter. I can honestly say, that is never how I've viewed finance. Instead, numbers reflect the outcome of decisions, made by leaders in the delivery of services to their customers who trust them to achieve their outcomes.

Make it personal

We all have to be positive advocates and take practical steps to reach out as role models or act as mentors. I don't think we can over-estimate the importance of authentic senior female role models as they are such a tangible indication that it's possible to succeed. It made a difference to me and I feel it's critical that I support others by sharing my experiences. Throughout my career I've promoted and supported diversity and inclusion for all and it's hugely rewarding. I mentored a 16 year old once, whose parents were not very supportive of her education. All I did was listen and encourage her to be focused on herself and what she needed. I bumped into her some years later, she thanked me for the support I'd given her during a very difficult time in her life. She's now on a fast track management programme.

There is an on-going debate about the need to improve our overall stance on diversity, and visibly so. I think we are right to be concerned about the lack of diversity in our organisations. We need to acknowledge that to drive innovation and strategic growth requires diversity of thought. This comes with securing diverse talent. Many studies

highlight the under representation of women, and Mckinsey's report in 2015 also includes an assessment on the positive difference that organisations enjoy where they also have black and minority ethnic people in senior leadership roles. The challenges facing the public sector, securing more from ever reducing budgets, requires diversity of thinking.

Finally, I think finance is viewed as somewhat as an "ugly sister" as one millennial shared with me, who said "it's boring when there are so many more fun things to do". It feels like it's time to remind everyone, especially via social media, that rightly or wrongly, money makes the world go around, and that finance is the hidden gem, which if managed well and ethically can support the realisation of our professional and personal dreams.

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